

England. — Baptists —

Western Association.

THE



ELDERS AND MESSENGERS,

OF THE SEVERAL

BAPTIST CHURCHES

MEETING AT

Kingsbridge, Tiverton, Chard, Wellington, Croscomb, Frome, Crockerton, Sarum, Bradford, Melksham, Calne, Griddleton and Malmesbury, Broad-mead and Pithay Bristol, Sodbury, Horshy, Cheltenham, and Bratton;—having received letters also from *Plsmouth, Exon, Cullumpton, Prescott, Upottery, Loughwood, Stokegomer, Bicknell, Yeovil, Horsington, and Kingstanley*; being met in association at *Bratton, Wilts*, the 21st and 22d of May, 1771, to the churches they respectively represent, send greeting.

HONOURED AND BELOVED BRETHREN,

AFTER having read your letters and taken notice of the accounts you give of your affairs, we would, according to our usual custom, address you. We can with pleasure inform you, and desire humbly to praise the God of peace for it, we found *all* the churches in peace; though we cannot but with concern observe there have been *fewer* added to the churches this year, than in any one year for a long time past: This would we mourn over, and earnestly cry to God, that he would display the riches of his grace more

abundantly, and make his gospel his power to the salvation of many in time to come; that so we may hereafter hear of multitudes, who have first given their own selves to the Lord, and then to his people, according to his will.

And now Brethren, suffer us, as in the presence of that God at whose bar we must all shortly stand, and from whom we are to receive our eternal doom, to deal faithfully with ourselves and you. Are not the things we profess to be concerned about of infinite importance? And can we with seriousness believe this, and yet treat them with coldness and indifference? We complain of deadness in the service of God, but do we not rest in *complaints*, *without* attending to those means which the Lord has appointed; and, in attending to which, we are to expect his presence and blessing? There is, 'tis true, nothing *in us*, or done *by us*, that can recommend us to the divine favor; but yet, are we not to wait upon God in those ways in which he has assured us of his gracious notice and regard? And, unless we do, is it not impossible to evidence our complaints are sincere, or that we are truly concerned about the removal of the evils we complain of? Let us then, in the strength of divine grace, with purpose of heart cleave unto the Lord.

We intreat you with an holy and humble zeal to adhere to, and hold fast those divine truths you have professed to believe; and though you may be looked upon with disdain, and treated with contempt for your attachment to them, we desire you will by no means be discouraged, nor grow indifferent in your regard to the important and glorious doctrines of the gospel. But then we desire you to remember there may be an expression of zeal for truth in the *theory* of it, when there is no such knowledge of it as affects the *heart* and influences the *life*; and those, who with the *profession* of the warmest affection for truth, are careless and unholy in their conversations, are the *greatest enemies* to those truths they pro-

fess a zeal for. The glorious truths of the gospel are designed to produce more important effects than to furnish us with fine speculations, or give us a capacity to talk of them with apparent fervor, and express our sentiments concerning them with propriety and justice; they are designed to make us *wiser* and *better*, to make us *humble* and *holy*. True religion is implanted in our hearts, to fit us to *serve* God here, and to *enjoy* him for ever. Let all then that take notice of us, see, whilst we embrace the soul-humbling truths of the gospel, we are circumspect, upright, and holy in the *whole* of our conversation. Let us ever take care that our deportment in our own houses, in the house of God, and in the world, be agreeable to the word of God. Let us take care of a *partial* regard to divine things, lest we should be of them who strain at a *gnat*, and swallow a *camel*. Such a conduct, you know, is highly displeasing in the sight of God, and exposes to the greatest contempt amongst all the wise and good; nay, those that are strangers to true religion, look on such *partiality* in religion, with great disdain. Would we then be concerned for the glory of God, for the honor of the gospel we profess, and for our own reputation, let us carefully avoid all matter of such reproach.

Take care, moreover, of a selfish sordid conduct in worldly matters. Let all we have to do with find, whilst we profess to be *religious* we are persons of strict *justice* and *veracity* in all we say and do; for the grace of God that bringeth salvation, will teach those that know it in truth, to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godly in the world; and a contrary conduct, as it is grossly repugnant to the word of God, so it exposes the gospel of Christ, and the professors of it, to the utmost contempt. Remember we have *professed* to be but strangers and pilgrims on the earth, let us under the influence of this profession act with an holy *indifference* to the things of time; that so whilst we *say* this is not our rest, we may *live* above the

flatteries and frowns of this perishing state, and have our conversation in heaven. Labor after the *power* of religion; and let us never forget, that whilst we should with care and diligence wait upon God in all his ways and ordinances, we are not to rest in a bare attendance to them. It is the enjoyment of God in the duties of religion, we should be solicitous about, that so we may make advances in religion, increase in the Christian temper, and in universal holiness of heart and life. Pray then, that you may meet with God in all the religious duties you engage in, and beware to guard against sins of omission; let not the infelicity of a bad frame discourage you, but look up to him with whom the preparations of the heart are, and still go on in the path of duty. Consider we are all travelling towards the eternal world. Let us then forget the things that are behind, and reach to those that are before! We would farther put you in mind of those duties we have from time to time taken notice of, such as reading the word of God, instructing those under your care, praying in your families, cultivating spiritual conversation, and watching over one another in the Lord. These and every duty would we charge upon ourselves, and intreat you to be found in the practice of! And in all, let the *word* of God be your *rule*, the *spirit* of God your *guide*, and the *glory* of God your *end*! Endeavour constantly to act as seeing him that is invisible; and consider the judge standeth before the door. Behold, says our divine master, I come quickly! May we be able to say, *amen*, so come Lord Jesus! A little while, and we shall part with the difficulties we are here called to conflict with; let us then bear them with patience; soon we shall have no opportunity to serve God here. O let us then be up and doing! Work whilst it is day; the night cometh when no man can work. May the love of Christ warm our hearts, and constrain us in his service! We trust it is our earnest desire, to be helpers of one another's and of your faith and joy. And now, that the God of all grace

may be with us and you, working in us that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Christ Jesus, that we may meet every change with fortitude, and lay ourselves out for the glory of God with diligence, and depending alone on the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ for the acceptance of our persons and services, may meet together at last in the world of everlasting joy, is the earnest prayer of your brethren in Christ.

*Signed, at the request and on
the behalf of the whole as-
sembly, by the Moderator*

JOHN TOMMAS.

B R E V I A T E S.

TUESDAY afternoon the Ministers and Messengers being met, our Brother *Rawlings* began in prayer, Brother *Tommas* was chosen Moderator, the letters from the churches were read, Brother *Day* was desired to draw up the general letter, and the meeting was closed in prayer by our Brother *Philips*.

On Wednesday morning at six o'clock, the Ministers and Messengers being again met, some time was improved in prayer by our Brethren *Crisp*, *Wykes*, *Rowles*, and *Wood*. At ten, the public Meeting was opened in prayer by our Brother *Francis*, Brother *Tommas* then preached from *Pf. 44. 4. Thou art my king, O God, command deliverances for Jacob*, and the meeting was closed in prayer by our Brother *Day*.

After the public service, a letter was read, signed by eight persons, in the name and on the behalf of the *Baptist Church, without Southgate, Exon*, and desiring to be continued in the number of the associated Churches: but as in another letter from the *Baptist Church in Exon*, signed by the late Minister of the *Baptist Church without Southgate, Exon*, and by the Minister of the *Baptist Church within Southgate*, and divers others, it was intimated that a *reunion* had taken place betwixt these two churches, it was thought prudent to defer the consideration of this matter to another year, when we may be better able to judge of it.

At three o'clock in the afternoon the public service was opened in prayer by our Brother *Sprague*, Brother *Newton* then preached from 2 Cor. iv. 1. *Therefore, seeing we have this Ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not*; and the Meeting was closed in prayer by our Brother *Ferrabee*.

After the public service, the general letter to the churches was read, approved, and signed by the Moderator on the behalf of the assembly.

The case of the church at *Melksham, Wilts*, was then read, setting forth the necessity they were under to rebuild and enlarge their place of worship, and their incapacity to defray the expence of such an undertaking without the generous assistance of their fellow Christians in other places; ---and it was unanimously

Agreed, to recommend the said case as highly deserving encouragement. It was also

Agreed, to recommend to the churches days of prayer and fasting as usual.

Agreed, to desire that the churches in this association, would by no means countenance any Minister, by asking him to preach, or in any other way, whose character they

are unacquainted with; as in many instances, for want of such caution, great reproach has been brought upon religion and the professors of it, and the peace of churches has been greatly interrupted.

Agreed, to hold the next association at *Sodbury, Gloucestershire*, Brother *Day* and Brother *Sprague* to preach the sermons.

The association was then closed in prayer by the Moderator.

N. B. Those churches that are in want of *Beddome's Baptist Catechism*, which has long been out of print, are desired forthwith to send orders for any number of them they are willing to take, to the Rev. *Hugh Evans, Bristol*; that another edition of that useful work may be speedily obtained, should there be a sufficient number subscribed for to defray the expence.

In the circle of this association the last year, there were

Baptized	- -	44	Deceased	- -	43
Restored	- -	2	Excluded	- -	3
		46			46

are in receipt of the same. The same is to be paid to the
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